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SUBJECT: BAGHDAD THROWS A CURVE BALL AT BABIL DA'WA

REF: HILLAH 26

CLASSIFIED BY: Kenneth M. hillas, PRT Leader, Babil PRT, Dept  
of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Da'wa officials in Babil and other the southern provinces have been asked -- but not instructed -- by Da'wa leaders in Baghdad to talk to ISCI about forming provincial coalitions, according to several sources. Babil Da'wa party Chairman Abu Ahmed Al-Basri confirmed that he was recently by April 6 by Abd Al-Karim Al-Enzi, a Da'wa COR member, on behalf of PM Maliki with the request that Al-Basri explore a power sharing arrangement with ISCI.

¶2. (C) Al Basri told the PRT that he responded by pointing out that there are no provincial posts left to offer ISCI, as they had already been promised to other coalition allies. He said that he told Al-Enzi that it is not possible to form a coalition with ISCI at the eleventh hour. The new Babil Provincial Council (PC) is slated to hold its first session on April 12, two days after the legal deadline has lapsed. The outgoing Governor has refrained from announcing a date for the convening of the new PC while ISCI tries to entice and/or intimidate defections from one of the parties belonging to the Da'wa-led four party coalition that had been expected to assume power. Al-Basri asserted that he had not yet met with ISCI officials to revisit the idea of ISCI joining the provincial government, although he said Da'wa made a general offer to cooperate in a new PC and was turned down. Another Iraqi source, however, claims he was present at an April 6 meeting at the Governor's residence at which Al-Basri and Governor Salim Saleh Al-Muslimawi (ISCI) discussed a possible coalition.

¶3. (C) Da'wa remains divided over who should be the next Governor. Al-Basri has made clear that he will within 30 days have the required university degree through a university extension program in which he has been reportedly enrolled. The timing is seen as suspicious by some new PC members, including those in the Da'wa-led four party coalition. Another Da'wa official and incoming PC member, Bank Manager Majid Flejfel, believes he best fits the profile of a competent administrator that the Baghdad Da'wa leadership reportedly wants for a new Governor. Flejfel and several coalition party members have stated that they will not vote for Al-Basri when the coalition picks its candidate on April 9 or 10. A compromise candidate for Governor reportedly is Ali Shelah, an advisor to PM Maliki and university professor, who is considered an independent and lived for several years in Switzerland.

¶4. (C) It is unclear what prompted this last-minute Baghdad guidance on reaching out to ISCI, or whether it will alter plans for a Babil coalition government between Jaffari's Reform Trend (promised one deputy Governorship), Al-Ahrar (Sadrist party to hold the PC Chairmanship), Iskander Witwit's Independent Bloc (slated for the other Deputy Governorship) and Da'wa (to get the Governorship). Al-Basri hinted that the PM was aiming to preserve Shia political unity at the national level. Al-Basri was reluctant to address the possible impact of Iranian Parliamentary Speaker Larijani's visit last week or Da'wa

concerns that Badr -- suspected by some in Da'wa of possibly being behind this week's rash of bomb attacks in Baghdad -- could destabilize the situation in the province if ISCI were left completely out of provincial government. In either event, the "request from Baghdad" highlights the national Da'wa leadership's role in trying to shape the provincial political landscape.

HILLAS